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LETTER DATED 13 JUNE 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 5 June 1997 from Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, addressed to the Executive Chairman of the Special Commission.

I request you to have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nizar HAMDOON
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Letter dated 5 June 1997 from the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq addressed to the Executive Chairman of the Special Commission Established by the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 9 (b) (i) of Security Council resolution 687 (1991)

I have received your letter of 4 June 1997 and should like to inform you that I greatly regret its contents and the hasty conclusions drawn in it.

Your letter uses an isolated incident, before all the facts are verified, as a pretext for jumping to political conclusions that have no objective basis and that, without any justification, bring into question Iraq's compliance with its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The operation flown by the Special Commission helicopter was in support of a ground inspection undertaken by UNSCOM 194 led by the Chief Inspector, Scott Ritter, with a view to securing the inspection of a sensitive site. It is therefore strange that your letter uses this incident to substantiate a serious accusation with regard to Iraq's commitment to the monitoring system. This impression is reinforced by the fact that you did not stop there, but assumed that such incidents would be repeated in the future, since you add a further damaging conclusion to the effect that any further repetition of this alleged violation will strengthen the fear that Iraq does not intend to carry out its obligations under the Security Council resolutions.

I conducted an immediate investigation into the incident and it is clear that an argument did take place between the Iraqi escort pilot and the Chief Inspector, owing to tension between the two. The investigation also found that there had been absolutely no physical contact between the Iraqi pilot or minder and the Special Commission's photographer. The reality is that the Iraqi minder put his hand in front of the camera lens in order to prevent photographs being taken. The Iraqi pilot also confirmed that the talk of shutting off the fuel pump had not been serious and that the Chilean pilot had not treated it as a serious threat. It is also worth mentioning that the Iraqi helicopter that was to be photographed returned to its site a very short time after take-off and was inspected by the Special Commission's ground inspection team, which did not find any proscribed items.

Another surprising aspect of your letter is that you accuse us of failing to honour our commitments to the Special Commission in respect of the compliance of the Iraqi pilots and minders with the flight procedures of the Special Commission helicopters. You ignore the fact that this incident, irrespective of its details, took place during one of hundreds of flight operations carried out over recent months that are continuing on an almost daily basis in a normal manner. Nevertheless, and in order to avoid the exploitation of this isolated incident for other purposes, I have ordered the Iraqi pilot and minder involved in the incident to which you refer in your letter to be relieved from such escort duties.

I should like to take this opportunity to make it clear to you that your having sent inspection team No. 194 at this particular time arouses our suspicions, as was made clear to you in the letter dated 30 May 1997 from Lieutenant-General Amer Mohammad Rashid. At the very time when we are concentrating all our efforts on technical and professional work with a view to closing the files, a team comes to inspect sites of the same type as many other sites that were previously inspected, most recently last March, on the pretext of alleged concealment by the Iraqi side. All that this has meant is a deliberate waste of time and effort, the fabrication of crises and tensions and, as a consequence, the jumping to political conclusions on your part in order to provide a pretext for directing such unfounded accusations against Iraq as are contained in your letter.

Iraq's commitment to the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions and to the fundamental matters agreed upon on 22 June 1996 is both serious and genuine. We hope that the Special Commission will conduct its operations in an objective and professional manner and avoid deliberate politicization. It should also avoid trying to prolong its duties, which to date have taken more than six years.

(Signed) Tariq AZIZ
Deputy Prime Minister